

July 6, 2005

TO: Early Childhood Supervisors

FROM: Ellen Frede, Ph.D.  
Assistant to the Commissioner  
for Early Childhood

SUBJECT: Guidance on the use of structured observation tools  
by Master Teachers

### **Choosing a structured observation tool**

This guidance clarifies the *purpose* of the master teachers' use of structured observation tools such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), the Program Quality Assessment (PQA), or the Implementation Checklist in the Abbott classes they serve. The **ECERS**, probably the most familiar of the tools, can be considered a generic measure of quality in early childhood classrooms. Using this tool facilitates comparison with statewide results. The **PQA** and the **Implementation Checklist** are curriculum specific (High /Scope and Creative Curriculum respectively). If classrooms across the district score consistently well on these measures of quality, the district may want to consider more targeted instruments such as the SELA, PCMI, or SELLCA. A district would need the approval of the DOE and the permission of the developer to use these instruments. Master teachers should be wary of using *more than one* formal observation tool at a time. However, their *thorough knowledge* of these tools and their contents can inform the quality of their coaching as they visit classrooms on a regular basis throughout the year.

### **Using a structured observation tool for coaching**

Structured observations should be used as formative evaluation tools and as such, should be administered at the beginning of the school year. The purpose of administering these tools is to present individual teachers with a template for effective practice. Master teachers who have established reliability, should visit their *assigned* rooms *individually* early in the year, and use the results of each evaluation for coaching in that particular teacher's classroom and as the basis of discussion between the master teacher and an individual teacher. For coaching purposes, individual scores should be shared with the teacher only if the teacher is scoring close to "good" or above, otherwise the results can be overwhelming

and counter-productive. Master teachers may ask teachers who have demonstrated a certain degree of expertise in the classroom to use the instrument for self-evaluation. Together they can discuss the results and develop the teacher's Professional Improvement Plan (PIP).

### **Using structured observation instruments for accountability**

According to Code, "The district board of education in consultation with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and with approval from the Department shall establish a *minimum acceptable score* for all preschool classrooms in operation in the district". If any classroom falls *below* the minimum acceptable score, an improvement plan needs to be established. The results of the observation should be discussed with the district early childhood supervisor and the principal or child care center director so that all may "participate in discussions to determine the classroom quality improvements that are necessary based upon the observation and *establish a timeframe* for making the required changes."

The master teacher shall provide technical assistance to the identified classroom teacher during this time. If the teacher's performance is still unacceptable according to the district's standards then "a reliable independent observer approved by the Department will evaluate the classroom or program".

Observations by master teachers may not be used to determine whether to contract with a classroom or provider. If it is verified that there is not identifiable improvement within the established time, steps shall be taken to remove the teacher from the classroom or terminate the Abbott Preschool Contract with that particular class.

### **Using structured observation instruments for professional development planning**

In addition to using structured observation instruments for individual teacher support, the district should also aggregate the results of the observations to determine the staff development needs of the district. Differentiated professional development should be part of this plan.

As a reminder, please review the Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines which outlines the role of the master teacher and the use of structured observation tools.

EF/cl/k:/individual staff folders\camille\guidance on the use of structured observation tools.doc